

Preserving Food: Freezing Prepared Foods

Foods for packed lunches or elaborate dinners can be kept in your freezer ready for busy days, parties or unexpected company. By planning a steady flow of casseroles, main dishes, baked goods and desserts in and out of your freezer, you can make good use of your freezer and good use of your time.

ADVANTAGES OF FREEZING PREPARED FOODS

- You prepare food at your convenience.
- Your oven is used more efficiently by baking more than one dish at a time.
- You avoid waste by freezing leftovers and using them as “planned overs.”
- Special diet foods and baby foods can be prepared in quantity and frozen in single portions.
- You save time by doubling or tripling recipes and freezing the extra food.
- If you cook for one or two, individual portions of an ordinary recipe can be frozen for later use.

ON THE OTHER HAND . . .

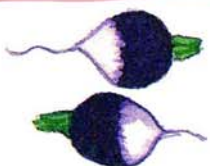
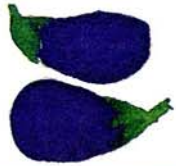
- Freezing is expensive when you add up the cost of packaging, of energy use and of the freezer itself.
- More energy is used in cooking, freezing and reheating than in cooking from scratch and serving immediately.
- Prepared foods have a relatively short storage life in the freezer compared to the individual ingredients like frozen fruits, vegetables and meat.
- Unless you have a microwave oven to dedicate to thawing during meal preparation, you must allow plenty of time for thawing in the refrigerator.
- Some products do not freeze well. Others do not justify the labor and expense of freezing.

PREPARING TO FREEZE

If you are not sure about how a prepared food freezes, try freezing just a small portion the first time and checking to see if the quality is acceptable in 1 to 2 months or more.

Foods to be frozen should be slightly undercooked if they are to be reheated after freezing. Foods should be cooled quickly for safety and freshness. Keeping foods at room temperature for several hours before freezing increases chances of spoilage and foodborne illness. Flavor, color, texture and nutrient content are likely to deteriorate also.

To speed cooling, put the pan containing hot prepared dishes—main dishes, sauces, etc.—in another pan or sink of ice water. This is especially important when preparing large amounts of food. Keep the water cold by changing it frequently or run cold water around the pan of food. When cool, package and freeze immediately. (**Note:** Do not place hot glass or ceramic dishes in ice water—they may break.)



PACKAGING

Pack foods in amounts you will use at one time. Once food is thawed, it spoils more quickly than when fresh.

Use moisture-vapor resistant packaging. Air shortens shelf life and affects food color, flavor and texture in undesirable ways. If you have empty space in a plastic freezer carton or other rigid container, fill it with crumpled freezer paper. Be sure to label each package with the name of the food and the date.

For packaging foods, coated or laminated freezer papers, plastic wraps or bags and heavy-duty aluminum foil are good. If lightweight freezer bags are used, protect them by placing them inside rigid containers.

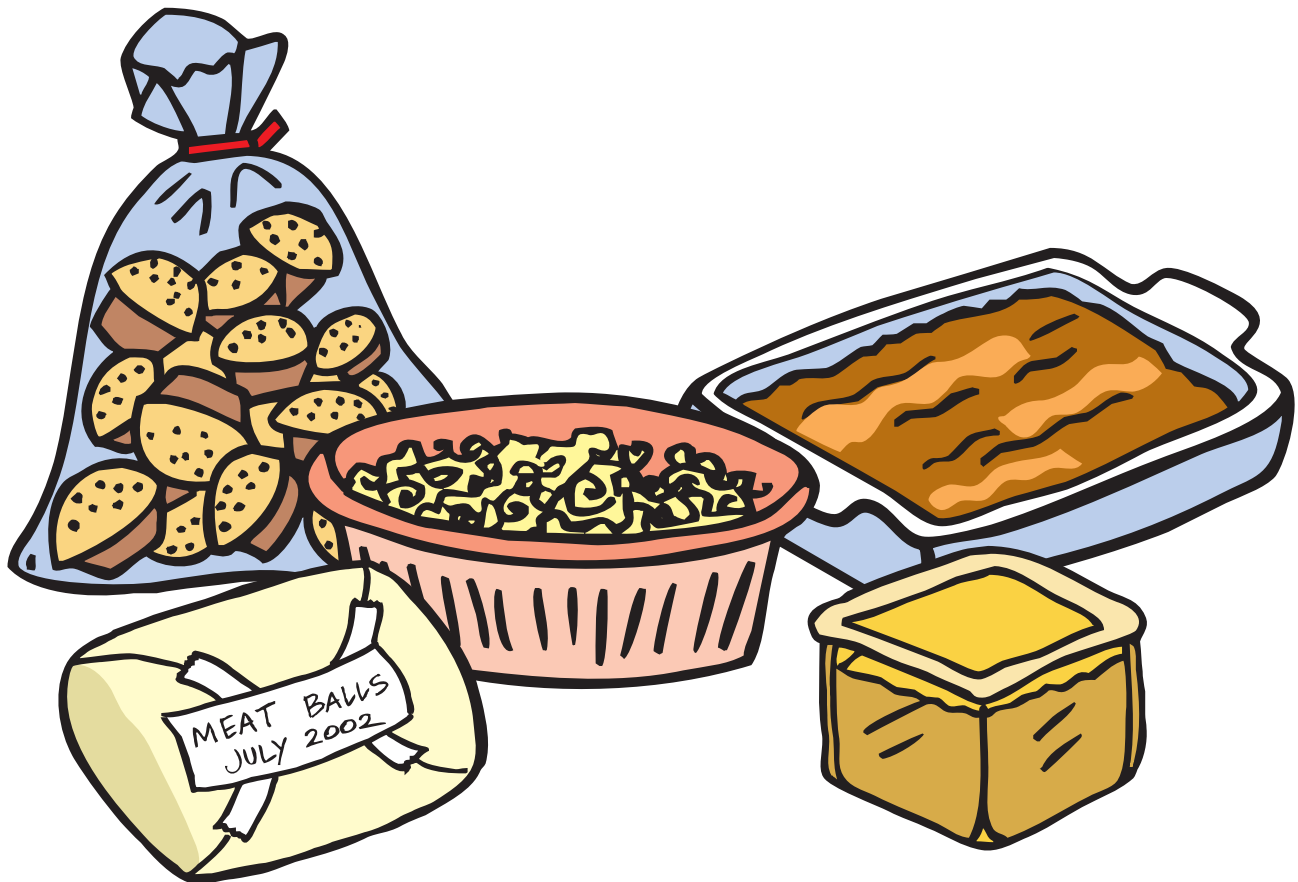
Rigid containers that can be used for freezing foods include plastic cartons or glass jars designed for canning and freezing. Wide-mouth jars are best for freezing because their contents are easier to remove before complete thawing takes place.

Some household food containers are not suitable for freezing. The cartons that come with milk, cottage cheese, yogurt, margarine, and many other refrigerated foods are not moisture-vapor resistant enough for freezing and do not produce seals airtight enough for freezing. Narrow-mouth jars can break at the neck from the pressure of food expanding. Jars not manufactured for extreme temperature changes can break easily also. Do not reuse plastic containers and trays that come with microwavable entrées.

FREEZER STORAGE

Freeze prepared foods at 0°F or below. For quickest freezing, place the packages against the refrigerated surfaces of the freezer. Spread the warm packages out around the freezer. After the food is frozen, rearrange the packages and store frozen foods close together. Freeze only the amount of food that will freeze within 24 hours. This is usually two to three pounds of food per cubic foot of freezer space.

It is a good idea to post a list of the frozen foods with freezing dates near the freezer and check the packages off the list as they are removed.



Freezing Prepared Foods

Other sources of information may list different storage times. Foods stored at 0°F longer than the storage times listed here should be safe but may be of less acceptable quality.

Foods listed in the sections below as “problem foods” are not recommended for freezing. For efficiency and a better-tasting product, these “problem foods” should be eaten soon after preparation.

BAKED PRODUCTS AND DOUGHS

Food	Preparing & Packaging For Freezing	Serving	Suggested Storage Time (at 0° F)
Baked Quick Breads			
Biscuits	Make as usual. Cool. Package.	To serve hot, heat unthawed, 350°F, 15-20 min.	2-3 months
Quick breads (gingerbread, nut and fruit bread, coffee cake)	Make as usual. Bake to light brown. Cool quickly. Package.	Thaw in wrapping at room temperature. If in aluminum foil, heat at 400°F. Slice fruit and nut breads while partially frozen to prevent crumbling.	2-4 months
Muffins	Make as usual. Package.	Thaw in wrapping at room temperature, 1 hour. Or, heat unthawed at 300°F, 20 min.	6-12 months
Waffles	Bake to a light brown. Wrap individually or in pairs.	Heat without thawing in a toaster, under broiler or on baking sheet at 400°F, 2-3 min.	1-2 months
Doughnuts	Make as usual. Cool. Package. Raised doughnuts freeze better than cake-type. Glazed ones lose glaze when frozen and thawed, but may be dipped in granular sugar after thawing.	Thaw at 400°F, 5-10 min., or in wrapping at room temperature if they do not contain cream filling. Thaw cream-filled doughnuts in refrigerator.	3-4 weeks
Yeast Breads and Coffee Cakes			
Bread, coffee cake, rolls	Make as usual. Cool quickly. Package.	Thaw at room temperature. If wrapped in aluminum foil, heat at 300°F, 15 min. (5-10 min. for rolls).	6-8 months
Brown 'n serve rolls	Make as usual, but let rise slightly less after molding. Bake at 325°F, 30 min. Do not brown. Cool. Package. Likely to dry out more in rebaking than when completely baked first and reheated.	Thaw in wrappings 10-15 min. Bake at 425°F, 5-10 min., or till light brown. If undercrust is too moist, bake on cooling rack instead of baking sheet.	6-8 months
Unbaked coffee cakes, bread and rolls	Use only recipes especially developed for freezing the dough.	Follow the recipe directions.	Up to 1 month

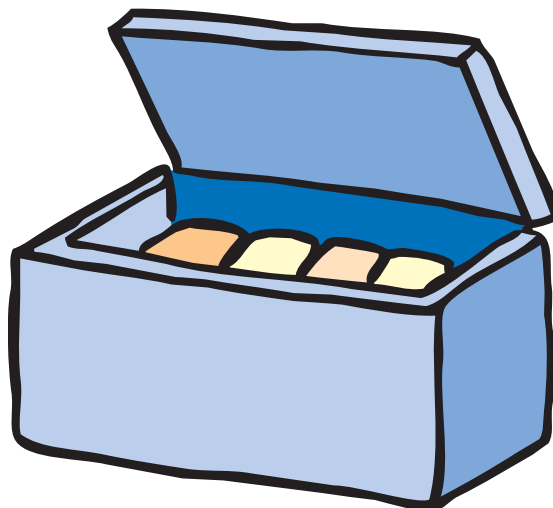
Cakes			
Angel food, chiffon, sponge cakes	Make as usual. Cool. <i>Frosted:</i> Freeze before wrapping. Do not use egg-white frosting. <i>Unfrosted:</i> Wrap and freeze. If freezing slices, place a double layer of freezer wrap or foil between slices. If baked in tube pan, fill hole with crumpled freezer paper. Put whole cake in box to prevent crushing.	<i>Frosted or filled:</i> Unwrap and thaw in refrigerator. <i>Unfrosted:</i> Thaw in wrap on rack 1-2 hours, room temperature. If wrapped in aluminum foil, thaw at 300°F, 15-20 min.	Egg-white cakes: 6 months Whole-egg cakes: 4-6 months Egg-yolk cakes: 2 months
Shortened cakes	Make as usual. Cool. For best results, freeze cake and frosting separately. Confectioners' sugar icing and fudge frosting freeze best. Do not use egg whites in frosting. Seven-minute frosting will become frothy.	Same as above.	2-4 months
Cupcakes	Make as usual. Cool completely before wrapping. Package.	Thaw at room temperature (about 1 hour). If unfrosted, thaw in aluminum foil, 300°F, 10 min.	2-3 months
Cookies			
Cookies, baked	Make as usual. Package with freezer paper between layers.	Thaw in wrappings, 15-20 min.	6 months
Cookies, unbaked	<i>Refrigerator cookies:</i> Form dough into roll. Slice if desired. <i>Drop cookies:</i> Drop on sheet or just package bulk dough.	Bake refrigerator cookies without thawing according to recipe. Bake formed cookies without thawing at 400°F, about 10 min. Thaw bulk dough at room temperature till soft enough to drop by teaspoons. Bake as usual.	6 months
Cream puffs, éclair shells, steamed puddings	Make as usual. Cool. Slit and remove moist parts. Do not fill with cream filling. May use ice cream fillings. Package.	Thaw in wrappings 10 min. at room temperature. Otherwise, thaw in refrigerator.	1-2 months
Pastry			
Unbaked pastry	Make regular pastry or crumb crust. Fit into pie pans. Prick regular pastry. Stack pie pans with 2 layers freezer paper. Put all in freezer bag. Or, store flat rounds on lined cardboard separated with 2 pieces of freezer paper between each.	Bake still frozen at 475°F, till light brown. Or, fill and bake as usual.	6-8 weeks
Baked pastry	Bake as usual. Cool. Package.	Thaw in wrapping at room temperature, 10-20 min.	2-3 months

Pies			
Chiffon pies	Make with gelatin base. May wish to freeze before wrapping to keep top from sticking to freezer wrap.	Thaw chiffon pies in refrigerator.	2 weeks
Fruit, mince, nut pies, unbaked	Make as usual except add 1 extra tablespoon flour or tapioca or ½ table-spoon cornstarch to juicy fillings to prevent boiling over when pies are baking. Do not cut vents in top crust. Steam and cool light fruits before making pies. Freeze in pan. Package. Unbaked fresh pies have a better fresh-fruit flavor than frozen baked pies, but bottom crust tends to get soggy. Fruit fillings may be thickened and cooled before adding to crust.	Cut vent holes in upper crust. Put pan on cookie sheet. Bake without thawing at 450°F, 15-20 min. Then reduce to 375°F for 20-30 min., or until top crust is brown.	Fruit pies: 3-4 months Mince pies: 6-8 months Nut pies: 3-4 months
Fruit, mince, nut pies, baked	Make as usual. Cool rapidly. Freeze before packaging. Pies are easier to wrap after freezing.	Let stand at room temperature about 15 min. Then heat in 350°F oven till warm, about 30 min. Otherwise, thaw in refrigerator.	3-4 months
Pumpkin pie	Prepare pie shell and filling as usual. Have filling cold before adding to unbaked, chilled pie shell. Package same as fruit pies.	Bake without thawing at 400°F, 10 min. Then reduce to 325°F to finish baking.	4-5 weeks
Fruit pie fillings	Make as usual. Package. Leave headspace.	Thaw just enough to spread in pie crust.	6-8 months
Sandwiches			
Regular closed sandwiches	Use day-old bread, spread to edges with soft butter or margarine. Omit crisp vegetables, hard-cooked egg whites, tomatoes, jellies and jams. Mayonnaise tends to separate. Use salad dressing or home-cooked dressing. Package.	Thaw in refrigerator in wrappings. Frozen sandwiches may be thawed in lunchbox for 3-4 hours maximum.	Cheese, ham, bologna: 3-4 weeks Others: 3-6 months
Hors d'oeuvres, canapés	Spread thin layer of butter on bread to prevent soaking or drying. Make as usual. Before packaging, spread a single layer on metal pans and freeze. Package toast or crisp-base appetizers separately. Use shallow airtight containers that hold not more than 2-3 layers. Separate layers with moisture-resistant paper.	<i>Toasted and crisp-base appetizers:</i> Thaw at room temperature, 2-3 hours. Do not unwrap. <i>Others:</i> Arrange on serving trays and thaw at room temperature about 1 hour. If any hors d'oeuvres contain meat, fish, eggs or dairy products, thaw in refrigerator.	3-4 weeks
Problem Foods			
Unbaked biscuits will be smaller and less tender.			
Unbaked muffins likely to have poor texture.			
Custard and cream pies soak into the crust.			
Meringue on pies toughens and sticks to the wrapping.			

MAIN DISHES AND MEALS

Food	Preparing & Packaging For Freezing	Serving	Suggested Storage Time (at 0° F)
Combination meat dishes—stews, spaghetti sauce with meat, ravioli, etc.	Make as usual. Keep fat to a minimum. Omit potatoes from stew. Slightly undercook other stew vegetables. Cool all combination dishes rapidly. Use rigid wide-mouth containers or freezer foil pans. Be sure meat is covered with sauce or broth. Leave headspace. Or, freeze in foil-lined casserole dishes. After freezing, remove from dish. Package.	Thaw in refrigerator. Reheat solid foods to at least 165°F within 2 hours at oven temperature of 325°F or higher. Reheat liquids to a rolling boil.	4-6 months
Creamed meats, fish, poultry	Use recipe with small amount of fat. Make as usual. Cool quickly. Package.	Heat frozen product to at least 165°F over boiling water. Stir occasionally to make smooth. Takes about 30 min. per pint. Or, reheat solid foods to at least 165°F within 2 hours at oven temperature of 325°F or higher. Stir occasionally to make smooth.	2-4 months
Dressing (stuffing)	Make as usual. Cool quickly. Pack in rigid containers.	Thaw in refrigerator. Put in greased casserole before completely thawed. Add a little water to the dressing. Heat at 350°F, or heat over boiling water, to a food temperature of at least 165°F.	1 month
Fish loaves	Make as usual. Do not bake. Do not put bacon strips on top. Pack in loaf pan. Package.	Thaw in wrapping in refrigerator, 1-2 hours. Unwrap. Bake at 450°F, 15 min. Then reduce to 350°F to finish baking, to a food temperature of at least 165°F.	1-2 months
Fried meats and poultry	Fry as usual till almost done. Cool quickly. Freeze on trays. Package. Fried meats and poultry may lose some fresh flavor and crispness.	Thaw in refrigerator. Place in shallow pan and heat without a cover at 350°F, 30-45 min., to a food temperature of at least 165°F.	1-3 months
Meals, whole (“TV dinners”)	Use food ingredients recommended for freezing. Prepare as usual. May use leftovers. Package in individual servings or sectional foil trays. Individual servings preferred. Cover with aluminum foil. Package.	Take off outer wrap. Do not thaw or remove foil. Heat at 400°F, 20-30 min., to a food temperature of at least 165°F. For crisp foods, uncover the last 10-15 min.	1 month

Meat loaf	Prepare as usual. Do not put bacon strips on top. May bake if you wish. Package.	<i>Unbaked:</i> Unwrap. Bake at 350°F, to a food temperature of at least 160°F in the center. <i>Baked:</i> To serve cold, thaw in wrappings in refrigerator. To reheat, unwrap and bake unthawed at 350°F, until all meat is at least 165°F.	3-4 months
Meat pies	Make as usual. Cook till nearly done. Omit potatoes. Cool quickly. Do not use bottom crust. Pour meat mixture into casserole or individual containers. Top with pastry. Do not bake. Freeze pie before wrapping. Package.	Cut vents in crust. Bake without thawing, at 400°F for about 45 min., for individual pies, 1 hour for larger pies. Bake until the pie reaches an internal center temperature of at least 165°F, and the meat mixture is piping hot and crust golden brown.	4-6 months
Non-meat casseroles (such as macaroni and cheese)	Make as usual. Cool quickly. May want to freeze in foil-lined casserole dishes. After freezing, remove food from dish. Package.	If in oven-proof container, uncover and bake at 400°F, about 1 hour for individual sizes, or 1¼ hours for quarts. Or, heat over boiling water. Always heat until internal center temperature reaches at least 165°F.	2-4 months
Pizza	Make as usual, but do not bake. Freeze before packaging.	Unwrap. Bake unthawed, at 450°F, 15-20 min.	1 month
Roast (beef, pork or poultry)	Roast as usual. Remove as much fat as possible. Slice to cool quickly. Turkey and other large fowl should be cut from the bone to cool quickly. Ham and other cured meats often lose color when frozen and become rancid more quickly than other meats. For short storage, roast may be packaged without sauce or gravy. To help keep meat from drying out, cover sliced meat with gravy, sauce, or broth. Package in rigid containers. Leave headspace.	Thaw dry meat in wrapping in refrigerator. If in aluminum foil, heat at 325°F, to a food temperature of 165°F, about 15-30 min. Thaw meat with sauce in refrigerator before reheating to 165°F.	2-4 months



SOUPS AND SAUCES

Food	Preparing & Packaging For Freezing	Serving	Suggested Storage Time (at 0° F)
Soups and pureés	Omit potatoes. If possible, concentrate by using less liquid. Cool quickly. Leave headspace. Or, freeze in ice cube trays and store cubes in plastic bags.	Heat without thawing. Heat cream soups over boiling water. Stir cream soup to keep smooth. Reheat to a rolling boil, or at least to a temperature of 165°F.	4-6 months
Sauces, dessert and meat	Since spices may change flavor over long storage, add just before serving. Package. Leave headspace. (Recipes using flour are not recommended – see “gravy” below).	Thaw in package in refrigerator. Reheat sauce to be served hot to a rolling boil while stirring.	3-4 months
<p>Problem Foods</p> <p>Milk sauces sometimes curdle and separate. Stirring while reheating helps keep smooth. Using waxy rice flour or waxy corn flour as the thickener also helps.</p> <p>Gravy tends to separate and curdle when thawed. It is better to freeze broth and make gravy just before serving, or use waxy rice flour or waxy corn flour as the thickener.</p>			

VEGETABLE DISHES

Food	Preparing & Packaging For Freezing	Serving	Suggested Storage Time (at 0° F)
Beets, Harvard	Make as usual but cook sauce just till thick. Cool quickly. Package. Leave headspace.	Heat over boiling water or in saucepan with water added if necessary.	4 months
Beans, baked	Make as usual. Use a minimum of bacon, ham or salt pork cut in small pieces. Bake until barely tender to avoid too much softening when reheated. Cool quickly. Package in rigid containers. Be sure all meat is covered. Leave headspace.	Heat over boiling water or in saucepan with small amount of water added. Stir frequently to prevent sticking. Or, bake at 400°F, to a temperature of at least 165°F, about 45 min. for pints, 1 hour for quarts.	6 months
Potatoes—baked and stuffed, Irish potatoes or baked sweet potatoes	Make as usual. Cool. Wrap individually in foil. Package.	Unwrap and bake without thawing at 400°F until thoroughly heated and lightly browned, to a temperature of at least 165°F.	2-4 weeks

Potatoes— mashed	Make as usual. Cool quickly. Shape into patties or leave in bulk. Pack patties with 2 pieces of paper between layers. Press bulk potatoes tightly into container in layers with 2 pieces freezer paper between layers. Press out air spaces. Place crumpled moisture-resistant paper on top.	Thaw just enough to separate layers. Slip into top of double boiler, and heat over boiling water to at least 165°F. Fry patties slowly without thawing. Reheat bulk potatoes in 350°F oven to a temperature of at least 165°F.	2 weeks
Potatoes— scalloped	Make as usual till almost tender and a delicate brown color. Leave in baking dish. Cool quickly. Cover surface with moisture-resistant paper cut to fit. Package.	Partially thaw in refrigerator, or bake unthawed. Bake at 400°F to at least 165°F. Add milk if necessary, after thawing occurs and before heating is finished.	2 weeks
Sweet potatoes, balls	Make mashed sweet potatoes. Form into balls. Brush with melted butter or margarine. Roll in crushed cereal flakes or finely chopped nuts. Freeze balls on baking sheet before packaging in rigid containers or freezer bags. Fill air spaces with freezer paper.	Bake on greased baking sheet, at 350°F, to at least 165°F, about 25-30 min.	1 month

Problem Foods

Cooked creamed vegetables tend to lose flavor rapidly and should only be stored a few days. To do this, cook vegetables and cool quickly. Add sauce. Package. Leave headspace.
Lettuce, other greens or raw tomatoes lose crispness and become soggy.

FRUIT DISHES

Food	Preparing & Packaging For Freezing	Serving	Suggested Storage Time (at 0° F)
Apples, baked	Bake as usual till barely done. Cool quickly. Wrap each apple individually. Pack in cartons. Seal and freeze.	To serve cold, thaw in wrapping in refrigerator. To serve hot, unwrap and heat frozen at 350°F, until steaming hot, about 15-20 min.	2 months
Applesauce	Make as usual. Cool quickly. Pack in rigid containers. Leave headspace.	Thaw in refrigerator.	8-10 months
Pears, baked	Same as baked apples.	Same as baked apples.	2 months
Salads with base of cream or cottage cheese, whipped cream or mayonnaise.	Make in large or individual molds. Fit a piece of freezer paper over the top and wrap in freezer paper. Or, line muffin tins with freezer film. Fill with mixture. Freeze. Wrap individually and store in freezer bags. Or, pour mixture in jar leaving headspace.	Thaw in refrigerator.	2 months

DESSERTS AND SWEETS

Food	Preparing & Packaging For Freezing	Serving	Suggested Storage Time (at 0° F)
Candies	Make as usual. Or, freeze commercially made candy. Package.	Thaw in wrappings at room temperature. Fat “bloom” which develops in chocolate candy during freezing should disappear. Cracks in brittle candies, chocolate-covered nuts and a few creams should disappear when candies are thawed.	1 year
Frostings	Frozen frostings lose some gloss, and ones with much granulated sugar may become grainy. Cooked frostings may crack. Confectioners’ sugar frostings freeze best. Package.	Thaw in refrigerator.	1-2 months
Ice cream, plain or in pies, cakes, rolls	Make as usual. Freeze before wrapping. If storing large, partially filled container, fill to top with freezer paper.	Thaw in refrigerator just until soft enough to serve.	1-2 months
Ices, mousses, sherbets, sorbets, Bavarians	Use recipes with cooked base, gelatin, marshmallows or other stabilizer. Do not use whipped egg whites. Mousses need only be mixed and poured into container. Sorbets and Bavarians should be frozen before they set, so they will be firmer after thawing and have less leakage. Pack in rigid containers or leave in molds.	Thaw in refrigerator just until soft enough to serve.	Mousses, Sorbets, Bavarians: 2 months Others: 6 months
Whipped cream, whipped cream toppings	Add 3 tablespoons sugar to each pint of cream. Whip before freezing. Put dabs of whipped cream on baking sheet or lined cardboard and freeze. Remove dabs and place in cartons or freezer bags.	Thaw in refrigerator or serve frozen.	3-6 months
Problem Foods Chocolate-covered cherries do not freeze well. Expansion during freezing causes them to break open.			

FOODS THAT DO NOT FREEZE WELL

The following foods do not produce good quality products after freezing and thawing. They are best preserved by another method or best left out of mixed dishes that are to be frozen.

Foods	Usual Use	Condition After Thawing
Cabbage*, celery, cress, cucumbers*, endive, lettuce, parsley, radishes	As raw salad	Limp, water-logged, quickly develops oxidized color, aroma and flavor
Irish potatoes, baked or boiled	In soups, salads, sauces or with butter	Soft, crumbly, water-logged, mealy
Cooked macaroni, spaghetti or rice	When frozen alone for later use	Mushy, tastes warmed over
Egg whites, cooked	In salads, creamed foods, sandwiches, sauces, gravy or desserts	Soft, tough, rubbery, spongy
Meringue	In desserts	Toughens
Icings made from egg whites	Cakes, cookies	Frothy, weeps
Cream or custard fillings	Pies, baked goods	Separates, watery, lumpy
Milk sauces	For casseroles or gravies	May curdle or separate
Sour cream	As topping, in salads	Separates, watery
Cheese or crumb toppings	On casseroles	Soggy
Mayonnaise or salad dressing	On sandwiches (not in salads)	Separates
Gelatin	In salads or desserts	Weeps
Fruit jelly	Sandwiches	May soak bread
Fried foods	All except French-fried potatoes and onion rings	Lose crispiness, become soggy
* Cucumbers and cabbage can be frozen as marinated products such as “freezer slaw” or “freezer pickles.” These do not have the same texture as regular slaw or pickles; they will not be crisp.		

EFFECT OF FREEZING ON SPICES AND SEASONING

- Pepper, cloves, garlic, green pepper, imitation vanilla and some herbs tend to get strong and bitter.
- Onion and paprika change flavor during freezing.
- Celery seasonings become stronger.
- Curry develops a musty off-flavor.
- Salt loses flavor and has the tendency to increase rancidity of any item containing fat.
- When using seasonings and spices, season lightly before freezing, and add additional seasonings when reheating or serving.



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